

Monday June 29, 2020 Zoom Press Availability: Senator Steve Glazer Calls on Governor to Take Steps to Protect Seniors & Medically Vulnerable

Senator Glazer: Nice to see everybody, good morning. Let me begin by saying Governor Newsom has done a very good job in leading California through the COVID-19 Pandemic. He was the first governor in the country to issue a shelter in place order for those who are 65+ and are medically vulnerable.

He of course acted on March 19th to create that shelter in place for everyone in CA, also ground breaking important and very necessary. And in that March 19th order he made clear that seniors and medically vulnerable were not going to move out of the shelter in place until stage 4.

The governor and his administration have done incredible work since those initial orders in preparing California for the surge and hospital capacity, his work to provide school lunches to kids who are not in school, his establishment of project room key to help the homeless get shelter were extraordinary works. Certainly his great plates program to help the elderly who were sheltered in place to get food are worthy of great praise.

His actions and those of the administration certainly significantly slowed the spread of this virus and saved countless lives. I also want to say at the start that I strongly support his mandatory mask order issued a few weeks ago and I strongly support his actions yesterday to close bars in various parts of the state that were not meeting the health requirements that put people at risk.

With all that being said, there are some additional steps I think can be taken to protect California. In May, I put out 10 questions that identified what I thought were blind spots in how California was responding to this pandemic. Just a few weeks ago, I put out an additional document outlining 12 additional steps that I thought Californians could be taking, (that) the state should be taking to protect us.

So in general the work has been extraordinarily good, but there are still blind spots that I think are limiting our ability to control this pandemic. And I can get into that more in the questions if you want to that follow up.

But today the focus is the elderly. I mentioned March 16th, when he issued that shelter in place ordinance that is still in effect. But ever since we entered stage 2, which was on May 8th and started to reopen our economy, that shelter-in-place order for seniors and the medically vulnerable has been forgotten, ignored, or in some cases contradicted.

If you look at the orders that have been issued in the reopening of stage 2 and stage 3, you will find places in which the government advises, in this case, retail shop managers, to set aside dedicated hours for seniors and the medically vulnerable that go contrary to his original order that says they shouldn't be out shopping.

And in fact you won't find mentions at all (from health orders around the state), or very few places, (directly referring) to those who are seniors or medically vulnerable.

So what I have asked the governor to do is three things.

Number one, I've asked him to modify his guidance regarding nonessential industries. We need to make it clear that seniors or medically vulnerable should not be working or even visiting in these places.

Number two, the governor should require these establishments to post signage warning seniors and vulnerable people that it's not safe to enter. You can go to a number of restaurants and retail establishments in California today and the signage out front requiring masks and physical distancing. But there is almost no mention anywhere that seniors and the medically vulnerable **should not be allowed in non-essential businesses**, even though we know that our seniors and others would like to shop and do things that are allowed in our reopening. Under the order in place today, they should not be doing that at all and the signage should make that very clear.

And third, the governor should continue his good work providing wrap-around services to help seniors and the medically vulnerable. I mentioned the great plates program, which has served, I think, over 33,000 seniors last week. These programs are terrific and should be expanded unless the guidance to seniors and medically vulnerable has changed and I am not aware that it has.

As we are reopening, and in some places as the governor is dialing it back, **we need to reemphasize that seniors and medically vulnerable folks need to stay home.** And I know that is a hardship and we have to do everything as a state to ensure that if we do want to protect our most vulnerable Californians we need to make it clear that they need to stay home and we need to do our best work to protect them. So that is the purpose of my letter to the governor and I would be happy to answer any questions about that or other things I've talked about today.

The one thing that people miss is that there are greater infections today than there were when the shelter in place order was instituted on March 19th. And while we have made great progress we have not flattened the curve.

We have bent the curve, and now we've plateaued. In fact, the last two weeks our hospitalizations are higher today than they were in April at the peak in California. There are more people in hospitals now due to COVID-19 than there were in our earlier peak in April.

The virus is dangerous and hasn't gotten any safer for people to move about. So, as we reopen we have to do it very carefully, protecting the elderly and medically vulnerable as the highest priority. For those who are able to, we are going to allow them to move about, but we need to make sure we take all the precautions to keep the infections down.

Victoria Colliver (CA Politico): Thank you Senator for taking the time to speak with us. I have two quick questions. One, it seems like you gave us two points instead of three. I just wanted to make sure I understand the third point in your letter. And second if you could comment on the Governor's action about the shelter in place order. How far do you think that goes, do you think he should go further in issuing any statewide orders that further restrict movement or activities?

Senator Glazer: Great, in regards to the three points: first, he needs to modify the guidance. The guidance that they are putting out on stage 2 and 3 have contradictions in them. It implies that the elderly can move about and that is not true given his original order, that is point one. Point two, is the signage outside all establishments – if they are not essential businesses – should make it clear that seniors and medically vulnerable that they should not enter and they should not be served. And the third is the wrap-around service for seniors who are sheltered in place. What more can we do to help them in this time? And, the second question was about whether or not he's doing enough? Victoria?

Victoria Colliver: Yes.

Senator Glazer: **In my view, this is a time for strong leadership.** Our circumstances require command and control and I know the governor is working very hard to be a gracious partners with counties who are on the front lines in many of these activities that we are trying to regular.

But I believe that we need stronger and tougher requirements and the attestations that have been allowed for different counties, I do think that if we are going trust that they are going do this work that they are claiming to do, then there needs to be verification of it.

And I think we have found in a lot of circumstances that counties have said we are going to we are going to take care of our nursing homes and then seen it completely break down. And then we're going to allow the opening of certain establishments under physical distancing and masking requirements and it not actually happening that way.

The LA Times I think did a review of 2,000 establishments a couple weeks ago and found that 1,000 were not complying. I am encouraging the governor and his excellent leadership to be stronger in creating statewide standards and requirements and not leave some of these decisions up to the counties.

We have already seen where the ugly head of politics is coming into play in some of the decisions that are being made in local communities and this is where in my view you need strong leadership in order to tame this monstrous virus. I would say he has done an excellent job, but I am supportive of him being stronger and enforcing his order statewide.

Victoria Colliver: Do you think he should institute any additional ones in terms of restaurants or other types of sectors?

Senator Glazer: I think it is a balancing act and I think what is very clear is that we have to protect the most vulnerable. I don't think his original order is being enforced, is not being understood and even enforced in most places in California so I think as you try to reopen the economy we have to protect the most vulnerable. So I don't think that follow through is there and I am trying to encourage more of that.

But as we reopen other sectors, here's the problem. The problem is that we are still blind in so many ways about this virus – how many people are infected and where they are getting infected

from. And these data blind spots remain to this day and the administration and most administrations around the country use a positivity rate in assessing spread.

But the positivity rate comes from tests that people voluntarily choose to take. And so it is a skewed metrics and to this day, we still do not have an honest assessment of community spread of the virus. We have none. And that doesn't come from biased tests where you decide you want to go and take one.

I know the administration is being attentive to this issue. I identified that blind spot many weeks ago and I know they are trying to find a way to get better assessments. But if you are going to take actions to limit the spread and actually reduce the spread, you have to know where it is coming from and we don't know.

We don't have clear community surveillance, we don't even have an aggregation of the data that's in the track and trace program that's in effect today. The track and trace is supposed to ask who you have been in contact with. But it should also be asking where have you been; are you a front line health care worker; are you an essential worker; have you visited bars and restaurants; what's your living circumstance; do you have anybody in your environment who has also been infected?

So we lack all the major data points in which to know where the spread is coming from. That that was my frustration when we started to reopen on May 8th; that we weren't flattening any curve. We were at a plateau in hospitalizations and infections and the only place to go from there is up. And that is exactly where we have gone because we have not gotten the intelligence to reduce beyond where we were in April.

Carla Marinucci (CA Politico): Yes, Senator you are focused on seniors. Isn't the problem right now the young people? Are seniors more in danger because they are going to Costco or because they are being infected by their own family members going out to bars, etc?

On that issue I am just kind of curious what about the young people and what they are doing to seniors. But also on the issues of prisons, where this seems to be exploding so much (amid) the senior population there. You know the governor, at least on Twitter, is getting a lot of pressure to commute sentences, or get these people out of the prisons to help contain the spread there. What is your thought on that as well?

Senator Glazer: Well let me take the last question first. The spread at San Quentin is terrible and what led up to that deserves a very careful examination. To remove prisoners from other prisons where there is a spread of the infection and bring them to San Quentin without current testing is crazy. And of course it's not just the prisoners it's also the correctional officers who are then leaving the prison to come into our broader communities here in the Bay Area.

The problem is prisons goes way beyond just the elderly. But obviously everybody who's in prisons deserves the absolute protections to keep them safe and healthy and it seems to have broken down in a very significant way.

In regards to young people, this goes back to the blind spots in our data. I believe that the spread that has been occurring in April, even after shelter in place for 60 days, has been happening in overcrowded living conditions where people, and in some cases multigenerational families can't be separated.

So that young person that goes out and about and gets the virus and may be asymptomatic, comes home and infects others in that household including the elderly, and that has serious consequences. And by the way, for the young people out there, nobody knows the long-term health effects of getting COVID-19. More than 50% of the hospitalizations are under the age of 50. And they may not die from it but the health care consequences could be very severe.

Once again, a big data blind spot in terms of the effect of the virus. So yes, are we seeing the spread among young people? Yes, but it has grave consequences for the elderly, especially in overcrowded living situations.

Amy Chance (Sacramento Bee): Senator, have you looked at the data that the governor has put out that shows the modeling of hospitalizations and deaths that are coming? And do you believe it? Some of the modeling seems very extreme, the Johns Hopkins numbers in particular. I'm just wondering if you've seen that and what your overall sense of that data is?

Senator Glazer: Well I'm very appreciative of the governor for putting that modeling online. That's a great transparency element we encouraged him to do that back in March when he was preparing for the surge. There were so many different studies and models out there that it was a little difficult to understand which was one he was using.

In fact I will remind you of the letter that he sent to President Trump in March, where he identified a spread that he thought was likely to occur in California. I think it was a 57% spread, and he did that based on a model and we weren't able to really look and understand the inputs that went into the models.

They are only as good as the assumptions that are made at the front end of that. And so I think the transparency has been good Amy. I have not looked at (hospitalization modeling) in any great detail to understand all the choices he has been making.

But if you do (modeling) based on hospitalizations, you are already three weeks too late to have a significant impact on a certain percentage of the population. So the hospital modeling I understand it in regard to capacity, but I don't understand it in regard to the choices in reopening.

It goes back to what are the goals going forward? Is it to flatten the curve or is it to maintain some semblance of our regular lives accepting a level of infection, hospitalization and death?

It is unclear to me and the models are one way to gauge the choices. The better way to make these judgments are with data that shows exactly what is happening, not what may happen. So the track and trace works, and the community surveillance surveys should be conducted. Those

are much better ways to have real time information and I think to make our choices on not just models with different assumptions.

Hannah Wiley (Sacramento Bee): Hi Senator, thanks for letting us join. One of the questions that I had was that this seems kind of what like Carla was asking: It seems it could become, due to the actions of younger populations, a long-term punishment dealt to a population that is not responsible for this surge of new cases. So, my question is how sustainable is it to impose these restrictions or these requirements for establishments to not allow seniors or medically vulnerable people into establishments?

Or if the governor did have a stronger hand, as you had mentioned, would it be necessary to require and to ask these older and medically vulnerable people to stay home for so long? And then you had also mentioned that there needed to be a stronger verification of how counties are handling what the governor has allowed them to start doing at the local level. So can you talk about the verification you have in mind?

Senator Glazer: Well, first this is a life or death choice for so many here in California. I don't think you should sugar coat the consequences of this virus on the elderly, yet it seems to have been forgotten. And if you look at the orders that have been issued over the last 4-6 weeks locally and statewide, you will find almost no mention of that absolute reality.

It is a life or death choice for a certain segment of our community and that creates enormous hardships on people there is no doubt about that. But it does not mean you cannot go out. And if you go back and look at the original order it shows that for those in those categories there are things they can do but they have to do them in very limited ways.

It is not about shopping for some new apparel at your neighborhood retail store. That is not an essential activity, so we have to protect our seniors and medically vulnerable from that circumstance, okay. And, again, I'm recognizing the hardship and recognizing the obligation that puts on all of us to protect them, and help them and support them.

Regarding compliance in my "12 Steps to Reopen California Safely," I suggested the state needs to establish protocols to monitor, educate and enforce compliance with physical distancing rules. Those protocols should be developed and distributed to all the counties, to make it clear that it is not just about saying you can open up construction. Well, who's on the construction sites making sure the physical distancing requirements are being met? If you are going to open up restaurants who is there to check those things?

And I know in my county I've raised this question of what is the monitoring that we are doing on nursing homes, on retail, on restaurants, on construction sites? And there hasn't been a big change in the ability of the counties to make sure their new rules and ordinances are being followed and that is a big blind spot for us, as the LA Times reported in their examination of restaurants in Los Angeles.

So if we are going to allow the counties to reopen in some fashion we need to have protocols being monitored correctly. If we can't monitor the reopening why are we still giving people

tickets for violating their meters on the streets? Where are our priorities? One is about life and death choices and the other one is about parking tickets.

I am not seeing very many places in the state that recognizes that it is not business as usual a la parking tickets but now we gotta make sure that if we are going to allow people to go out and about and go to retail or restaurant we gotta make sure they are following the rules.

And yes, we want to educate, yes we want to warn them, but if it's not being done correctly then you gotta shut it down and you've got to be very clear about that. So I think we have lost our sense of priorities. But this is where the state should be clear about what those protocols are and making sure people are reopening safely. If we are going to allow that then we've got to make sure it is being done right.

Amy Chance: How much do you think California has a language issue that it needs to overcome? Many people in the state speak multiple languages, do you know how much is being done from the statewide level at communicating public safety information in multiple languages and whether more is necessary there?

Senator Glazer: That is an important question Amy. I don't feel like I am in the best position to give you a good answer. I don't know. But that is something that is vital. All of these orders have to be translated and communicated clearly. Obviously what I am raising today is not an issue of translation. I think it is an order that has been ignored for the seniors and those medically vulnerable. So it is not a translation issue. It is a problem in English, and it is my belief that it is a problem in every language because it is simply not happening.